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ABSTRACT

The Junior Secondary School (JSS) program introduced in 1976 appears to have been the answer to the popular call for educational reform in Ghana. Vocationalization actually starts at the JSS level. JSS students are not trained for any particular occupation but are exposed to prevocational experiences to enable them to discover their aptitudes and potentialities. The curriculum is broad-based and has academic, technical, vocational, and commercial (business education) components. The problems facing the JSS are legion, but the most important are those of finance, equipment, physical facilities, staffing, and textbooks and other instructional materials. Initial preparation has been undertaken for an evaluation of the JSS program. The objective of the study is to analyze the nature, implementation, and impact of the JSS program, specifically related to program goals and rationale, program establishment and implementation, curriculum, student characteristics, and program output. Personal interview schedules, questionnaires and attitude scales, and observation scales have already been prepared, and two workshops have been organized for the project, which represents the first systematic evaluation of an educational program to be undertaken in Ghana. (YLB)

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VOCATIONALISING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

7-9 May, 1986

EVALUATING JUNIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION
IN GHANA

J.K. ADU

Ghana Education Service

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Evaluating Junior Secondary Education in Ghana

J.K. ADU

Vocationalization of education has a long history in Ghana and dates back to colonial times. It began on a modest scale as a missionary effort and took the form of the addition of vocational subjects such as agriculture and crafts to the existing curriculum. Later the colonial administration sought to diversify primary and secondary education, particularly the latter, by inclusion of agriculture, technical and vocational subjects in the curriculum of selected government schools. As was to be expected at the time, the colonial government's policy was regarded with a great deal of suspicion and some early nationalists and influential interest groups considered the process as an attempt "to provide Africans with an inferior education, at least likely to hold back progress in secondary school and university education." (McWilliam p.57).

In post-independence Ghana, vocationalising education is seen as an essential alternative to the purely academic education often blamed for producing school leavers with no marketable skills and who are, therefore, unemployable and "who disdain manual work" and are alienated from their social milieu.

Since attaining independence in 1957, Ghana has been taking some far-reaching decisions not only to democratize education but also to make it more relevant to the needs of the individual and the society of which he is an integral part. (e.g. Education Act 1961 basic education free and compulsory, free textbooks scheme).

One of the most important educational innovations was undertaken with the publication in 1974 and subsequent implementation in 1976 of what has since become known as the "New Structure and Content of Education for Ghana". One of the most salient features of this reform is the systematic and planned vocationalisation of basic and secondary education through the diversification of their curricula.

The goals of vocationalising education are legion and the process is seen, at least in official circles in Ghana as:

(i) an avenue for transmitting skills and desirable attitudes which will be useful for securing gainful employment.

(ii) a means of preparing the youth for self-employment.

(iii) a way of reducing school leaver unemployment.

(iv) preparing the school leaver to want to work in the rural areas and thus stem the drift from rural areas to urban centres in search of white-collar jobs. etc.

The Junior Secondary School (JSS) programme which was introduced in 1976 and which is the focus of the present paper appears to have been the answer to the popular call for reforms in the educational system which the people of Ghana had been searching for all these years following their political independence. It must be noted, however, that the JSS is only a part of a larger package of educational reforms covering the whole of pre-university education.

Background of the JSS Programme

In March 1972, the Ghana Ministry of Education submitted for public discussion, proposals on a new structure and content of education. In June of the same year, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Rev. Dr. N.K. Dzobo to consider the Ministry's proposals and the views expressed by the public. This

committee reported back in October 1973. What has become known in Ghana as the New Structure and Content of Education is, in fact, a blend of the proposals which were accepted for implementation.

Goals of the J.S.S.

According to the new structure and content of education, basic education in Ghana is a nine-year course consisting of 6 years of primary education followed by three years of junior secondary education. The course (basic education) is both terminal and continuing. It is also free and compulsory. The J.S.S. curriculum is broad-based and has an academic component as well as technical, vocational and Commercial (or Business education) components. Thus it is at the level of the J.S.S. that vocationalisation actually starts. It is pertinent to say that no attempt is made, at the J.S.S. to train pupils to become skilled craftsmen, tradesmen or artisans nor are they trained specifically for any particular occupations. What needs stressing here is that J.S.S. pupils are merely "predisposed to acquire the knowledge, skills and pre-vocational experiences that will enable them to discover their aptitudes and potentialities - to develop a longing for further improvement.

In sum, the J.S.S. programme was designed to

(i) prepare the pupils for using their hands as well as their heads

(ii) help the pupils to appreciate the dignity of labour and the interdependence of all workers

(iii) provide a link between education and work by developing in the pupils practical as well as intellectual capabilities through a combination of applied and academic courses and also through the encouragement of desirable attitudes to the workplace or to further education.

(iv) encourage self-employment among school-leavers and thus minimize, if not eliminate, the drift by them to urban centres for jobs that do not exist.

(v) to raise the quality of basic education and provide access to three years of secondary education to all primary school leavers.

(vi) reduce pre-university education from 17 to 13 years and basic education from 10 to 9 years.

Implementation of the J.S.S. Programme

The first J.S.S. were established in 1976. There were nine such schools, one in each of the then nine administrative regions into which the country was divided. They were existing middle schools which had been converted into J.S.S.

Heads of these "Experimental" J.S.S. were appointed and briefed by the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service (GES) on the J.S.S. programme generally and the syllabuses specially by the CRDD for the programme were discussed.

The staff of the schools were appointed from the ranks of experienced teachers preferrably those who had done a post-secondary teacher training course or a specialist course in their area of specialization. During the same year too, special 3-year post-secondary training colleges were set up to train teachers specifically for the J.S.S.

The original policy was to admit pupils from primary six into the J.S.S. but, as it turned out, middle school pupils found their way into the 'Experimental'

J.S.S. In 1977 eight more J.S.S. were added to the number and expansion of the J.S.S. programme continued space until by 1980/81 the number had increased to one hundred and eighteen (118) most of which are located in the regional and district capitals and the rest in mainly urban areas. Since 1981 the Government has put a freeze on further openings. To date only sixteen(16) of the schools have been "upgraded" to Senior Secondary (Lower).

The J.S.S. programme provides a wide range of subjects or courses which are grouped as follows:

Core Subjects (Compulsory) - English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.
Technical - Technical Drawing, Metal work, Woodwork etc.
Vocational - Home Science, Catering, Dressmaking, Tailoring, Agriculture etc.
Commercial - Business Studies) - Book-keeping, Typing, Commerce etc.
General - Ghanaian Languages, French, Music, Religious Education etc.

Altogether there are twenty-eight (28) subject areas for the J.S.S. programme and schools are encouraged to offer those courses that have relevance to the occupations prevalent in their areas of operation.

For purposes of examination or final assessment, pupils in the J.S.S. are required, in addition to the four compulsory subjects, to choose two subjects from either the Technical or Vocational or Commercial group and two from the General Subjects group. He may, if he wishes, also choose two more subjects from any of the groups. A candidate may thus take 8 (minimum) or 10 (maximum) subjects for his final examination which consists of a theory paper (or papers) and practical tests. This end-of-course examination is used for certification as well as for selection for further education.

Problems of Implementation

The problems facing the J.S.S. are legion but the most important are those of finance, equipment, physical facilities, staffing and textbooks and other instructional materials.

Finance: The lack of funds is a common factor of practically all the problems that militate against the smooth implementation of the J.S.S. programme. Grants to the J.S.S. have not been forthcoming or are inadequate for their needs. There are no funds for building new classrooms or renovating existing ones or for building science laboratories and workshops where they are not available.

Equipment: Until recently, there was a serious dearth of basic equipment (machines and tools) in the J.S.S. even for those practical courses that were central to the new programme. The situation, however, has been eased considerably by a bilateral agreement signed between the Ghana Government and the German Democratic Republic under which the latter supplies some specified basic equipment.

Physical Facilities: The inadequacy of classroom facilities means that fewer pupils can be admitted into the J.S.S. in any particular year. The original policy of converting existing middle schools (over 4,000 of them) into J.S.S. has not been abandoned. But whereas each J.S.S. is expected to have two streams needing six classrooms, the converted middle schools usually have only four, so some J.S.S. have to combine classes with all the problems and inconveniences this entails.

In some cases where a J.S.S. has no workshop or laboratory, pupils may have to walk, often long distances, (for lack of transport) to a resource centre, if one is available, to do their practical activities.

Staffing: Efforts were made to produce teachers who were specialists of a sort in three subject areas which they were to teach in the J.S.S. Subjects were

grouped and specialist post-secondary colleges organised to prepare students for work in the J.S.S. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain the full establishment for various reasons. Most of the colleges could not recruit the right calibre of students for their courses and the college tutors themselves were not adequately prepared for and oriented to their new tasks. The initial results of the qualifying examinations were appalling and the tutor preparation programme had to be scrapped and replaced.

There is a high rate of attrition in the teaching profession in Ghana and this, coupled with the recent exodus of teachers to neighbouring countries, has exacerbated the shortage of qualified staff for the J.S.S. programme.

Furthermore, the products of the 3-year post-secondary colleges are reported not to possess adequate technical/vocational experience and are not well-equipped to teach the practical subjects effectively.

Textbooks The general shortage of textbooks for all levels of pre-university education is most acutely felt in the J.S.S. which have to work with new and varied 'specialized' subjects. The shortage of foreign exchange has made it difficult to import textbooks and in sufficient quantities for the schools. Efforts however, have been made by the Government to produce locally, textbooks which would, hopefully, reflect the curricular changes that are envisaged in the J.S.S. programme, and indigenous writers are being encouraged to write all kinds of books.

Rationale for Evaluating the J.S.S.

The J.S.S. programme is both terminal and continuing. The original plan was for the products who could make the grade after a competitive examination, to continue in Senior Secondary (Lower) Schools (SSL) for 2 years to prepare them for the G.C.E. (O Level) or go to Technical or Vocational or Commercial schools for a three-year course. In all cases, the pupils would have the opportunity to pursue the courses taken at the J.S.S. level.

Over the years, the majority of JSS leavers are known to enter traditional secondary schools. In fact, a sample taken from fourteen (14) J.S.S. shows that in 1984, out of the 414 J.S.S. leavers, 60% entered traditional secondary schools as against 21.2% going to Technical (18.1%) and Vocational/Commercial institutes (3.1%) put together. Those who enter traditional secondary schools take the same examinations as their counterparts who have not been through the J.S.S.

Although J.S.S. leavers were to enter Form 4 of the secondary school what actually happened was that such pupils joined different class levels in the traditional/ academic secondary schools depending on the admitting schools' reassessment of their capabilities. Later the original policy ahd to be reversed in favour of JSS leavers entering Form 3 (instead of Form 4) of the secondary school. This has not only caused frustration among the JSS pupils and parents but it has also given the impression that the J.S.S. products are inferior to their counterparts in traditional secondary schools.

With a diversified and vocationalised curriculum, the J.S.S. is the most important educational innovation in the Ghanaian context. Its development has naturally become a primary concern to the Ghanaian society.

The J.S.S. is the most widely publicized educational innovation in Ghana and this has increased public awareness of, and interest in it and in its implementation

some aspects of which the people are questioning, e.g. the automatic access to 3 years of J.S.S. education to all primary six pupils is not being fully implemented. The majority of primary six pupils continue their course in middle schools which continue to be run alongside the J.S.S..

The J.S.S. programmes had been subjected to general public debate before its launching; the public now is anxiously questioning its outcome.

In view of the hiatus in expansion of the programme, and the need to ensure effective utilization of scarce resources, the need has arisen for an in-depth review of the system to determine if it is working as intended and how, what modifications are needed and whether it should be extended further.

A comprehensive evaluation of the J.S.S. programme has been proposed and the initial preparation undertaken.

The overall objective of the study is to analyze and evaluate the nature, implementation and impact of the J.S.S. programme. Specifically, the project will establish critical, policy -focussed information related to five dimensions of the J.S.S. innovation.

(a) programme goals and rationale, what these were originally and whether and how they have changed and with what effect.

(b) the establishment and implementation of the J.S.S. programme in terms of the nature and adequacy of the support infrastructure, relations with the community and the rest of the education system (e.g. feeder and receiving schools) and the teacher preparation and in-service programmes;

(c) the curriculum as used in the classroom with respect to the appropriateness and quality of materials, teaching methods, classroom interactions and assessment procedures.

(d) Characteristics of the J.S.S. students, their age, sex and socio-economic background and previous academic experience, their educational and/or occupational aspirations, their attitudes towards the programme and their degree of success in it, and

(e) to establish a "pattern of destiny" of the programme's output, find out views about and attitudes towards the J.S.S. programme.

Sample: The evaluation is limited to a sample of ten (10) J.S.S. including three of the "Experimental" ones. The sample is purposive, with schools representing the different regions (10 in all), urban/rural settings and socio-economic differences in the community.

The target groups consist of J.S.S. teachers and heads, pupils, community leaders, heads of admitting institutions - i.e., secondary, technical, vocational, commercial - Regional Directors of Education, District Assistant Directors, other administrators/ decision-makers, and parents. A total of 447 individuals connected with the J.S.S. programme will be interviewed and/or will be completing questionnaires for the study.

Data Collection - Already, instruments for data-collection have been prepared. They include

Personal Interview Schedules
Questionnaires and attitude scales
Observation schedules

as well as formats for survey data, documents analysis and regional portraits. These instruments are in the process of being tried out for validation.

Two workshops have already been organised for the evaluation project. The first produced the propoaal for the study. This workshop was assisted by Dr. Kevin Lillis of the University of London Institute of Education, who was its consultant. The second one was organized in October 1985 with Professor Tom Russell of Queen's University, Canada, as consultant. This workshop was organized to train the field staff in data-collection methods. Both consultants, Dr. Lillis and Prof. Russell's visits were financed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

The entire evaluation project is being jointly financed by the IDRC and the Ghana Government with the IDRC providing the bulk of the funds and the equipment such as transport, micro computers, typewriters and stationery.

Results - The Evaluation will provide detailed information to the Ministry of Education and other decision-makers on those elements of the J.S.S. which are moving and which are not.

> On where blockages to the effective realization of the programme objectives are occurring and why.
> On what students, teachers and parents perceive to be the merits of the programme in terms of the operation and quality of its graduates.
> The Evaluation will provide concrete, policy-relevant and hopefully feasible recommendations for modifying and strengthening the intent and the management of J.S.S. schools.

Conclusion: This evaluation project is the first systematic evaluation of an educational programme to be undertaken in Ghana. The benefits to be derived are immense. It will ensure, at least for the present programme, that our efforts to improve the education system are based on the systematic generation and analysis of data derived from research. In this way, the study marks the beginning of a movement away from the position where important decisions made on education are "guided more by intuition and best judgment" than investigative review.

In addition to the foregoing, the evaluation project is expected to develop and strengthen the research capacity of the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) through the staff of the Division who are directly responsible for the study. A strong research base at the CRDD will enable the important institution of the G.E.S. to fulfill its research mandate.

Submitted by J.K. ADU
C.R.D.D.
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